

Accountability in artificial intelligence: what it is and how it works

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Abstract

Accountability is a cornerstone of the governance of artificial intelligence (AI). However, it is often defined too imprecisely because its multifaceted nature and the sociotechnical structure of AI systems imply a variety of values, practices, and measures to which accountability in AI can refer. We address this lack of clarity by defining accountability in terms of answerability, identifying three conditions of possibility (authority recognition, interrogation, and limitation of power), and an architecture of seven features (context, range, agent, forum, standards, process, and implications). We analyze this architecture through four accountability goals (compliance, report, oversight, and enforcement). We argue that these goals are often complementary and that policy-makers emphasize or prioritize some over others depending on the proactive or reactive use of accountability and the missions of AI governance.